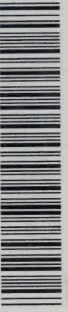



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# labour- management consultation committees

*General publications*

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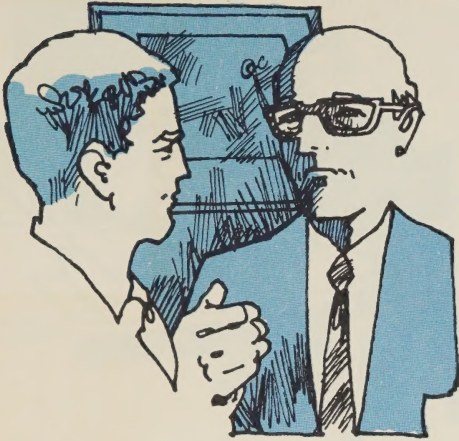
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## INTRODUCTION

The purpose of the Labour-Management Consultation Branch of the Canada Department of Labour is to reduce conflict in industrial relations by promotion of union-management joint consultation in Canadian business and industry.

Even in this super-mechanized age, the single best way to reduce conflict and promote understanding is still the same method that our remote ancestors used — the face-to-face meeting. We call it joint consultation.

Joint consultation is a simple idea: in fact, it's so simple, so basic, that its value is often overlooked. It would seem, because we live in a complicated, ever-changing world charged with multi-faceted problems, that we look for solutions as complex as the problems. And yet the simple solution — joint consultation — works. It takes time, patience and the kind of experience that comes only with practice, but it does work.

The LMC Branch, with its experienced officers in Ottawa and in field locations across Canada, can advise you on all aspects of how to improve communication and co-operation in your own industrial relations community through joint consultation.

There are two main aspects to the LMC Branch's program of joint consultation. First, there is the committee, which functions at the plant or business level; secondly, there is the conference, which is an area- or industry-wide consultation system.

In this booklet, we show you how the programs work by using examples drawn

from our files.

For further information you may contact the Labour-Management Consultation Branch, Canada Department of Labour, Ottawa 4, Ontario.

## THE LABOUR-MANAGEMENT CONSULTATION COMMITTEE

- operational framework
- participation framework
- good communication techniques

### The Labour-Management Consultation Committee

The primary unit in the joint consultation program is the labour-management consultation committee.

The committee is the meeting place where union and management come together to talk, bringing forth their different points of view and in a spirit of good faith, finding solutions to common problems. Good faith is an intangible element that prevails in well-established, successful committees; it's the glue that joins all the disparate elements of the group into one functioning body; in fact, field officers report that you can virtually see the difference between the working methods of committees that have, over the years, built up a "spirit of good faith" and those, usually younger, committees that are more guarded, more wary in their approach.

In tough situations, tempers sometimes fly, but where there is good faith, the objects of these attacks are the common problems, not the fellow committee members.

Relations are not always smooth; trouble-shooting is not always an easy job, but still, talking things over works.



Finding a common ground is a more efficient approach than finding a battleground.

But more than that, the LMC committee involves people in the shaping of their work environment. It is an example of participatory action, giving personnel at all levels a chance to work together toward common goals and, through joint discussion, reaching joint decisions.

There must be a bona fide union — certified as bargaining agent — in operation in the business or plant.

All committees have two things in common, even such dissimilar committees as those we have chosen for our examples: the operational framework and the participation framework.

The operational framework of a committee consists of these elements:

- aims and objectives
- guidelines for members
- committee agenda

(The operational framework is dealt with in full in the booklet entitled *LMC Committee Handbook*.)

The elements necessary to a smooth working committee are these:

- parliamentary immunity
- co-operation and good faith
- good communication techniques

### **The Operational Framework**

• The terms of reference define the aims and objectives of the committee. At the same time, they must be flexible enough to be changed to meet changing circumstances.

In some cases, committees have found it possible to operate without specific terms of reference, using instead com-

mon sense and experience as guidelines.

- The agenda should be a communication link between management and union representatives on the committee. It must be distributed as far enough in advance of the meeting as possible to allow members time to do their homework.

- Make sure that the minutes of the meeting get as wide a distribution as possible.

### **The Participation Framework**

There are three sections to a good labour-management consultation committee. These are:

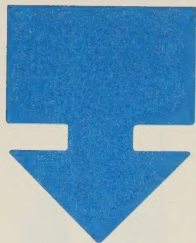
- the members who represent management
- the members who represent the union
- the constituents and supervisory staff

The committee is really a sort of message center: it receives the signals, it acts on them and it sends them out again. It is vitally important that the communication channels be kept open and that the flow of information goes both ways — in as well as out — from the constituents and the supervisory staff to the committee — from the committee to the constituents and supervisory staff. A committee cannot do its job properly unless it touches and involves all levels of management and union.

A good union representative will constantly seek out and encourage his constituents to participate in joint consultation by submitting their ideas. He must be in touch with everyone, not just the ready talkers, for he is the link between management and the body of the employees.

Management representatives, too, must





maintain contact with their own structure. They should be in a position of sufficient authority that they can quickly follow through on the findings of the committee.

The major objective of any committee is to improve union-management relations; this means committees can discuss any matter which could create conflict if it were left unrecognized and unresolved.

All other objectives are secondary, because no other objectives can be met unless the primary purpose — the reduction of conflict — is kept to the fore.

When good faith has been established, committeemen can discuss conflict issues and yet come away from a meeting with mutual feelings of respect still intact.

A senior representative of the Labour-Management Consultation Branch recalls a situation where the spirit that had been developed in the committee carried the day: "The company and union had been resting quietly on a contract drawn up a year earlier. They had worked it out together assuming they had made provision for all possible conditions.

"This was a small company employing unionists, and relations were good. Then Asian flu struck. So many men had to book off sick that the rest had to work overtime to take up the slack; this created the unforeseen problem of transportation. Car pool schedules were shot. Public transportation at off-peak hours was bad.

"At this point management could have said 'I'm sorry but we'll stick to the agreement' and the union could have retaliated.

"But management and union were so used to joint consultation that, as a matter of course, they turned the problem

over to their committee.

"One short, emergency meeting and a potentially hot issue was solved. When it's time for a new contract, the transportation clause will be added. There probably won't be time wasted over discussion of this point because union and management have already worked out the details."

Co-operation based on good faith increases as committee members get to know each other. But what happens when a newly-elected committee takes over from the old? Some committees have solved this problem of "continuity" by a gradual rotation of members. Other committees will invite special guests — people in the organization who are interested in the work of the committee and have something of value to contribute. Often, these guests turn up on the new slate of committee members.

Co-operation depends, to a great extent, on good communication. Everyone talks but few communicate as clearly as they believe. We are so conditioned to communication failures that we accept them as a normal part of life. They are, of course, but it's been our experience that a good percentage of these failures can be foreseen and avoided.

Keep meetings as short as possible. When they run over two hours, people become fatigued and, thus, poor listeners and poor talkers.

Make sure that your message is getting across and that your listeners are hearing not only your words, but the actual meaning. If there is any doubt, ask the listeners to repeat in their own words what you



have just said. And when you are in doubt, rephrase the speaker's words.

A field representative of the Labour-Management Consultation Branch outlines the art of listening:

"Listen to the facts — the message — and try to ignore the delivery; an impassioned speaker may make a good impression but when you try to analyze what he said, you find that although he spoke fluently, he said little of value.

"It has been said many times by many learned people, that all our listening is filtered. That we, when listening, tend to assess what we are told by using a filter composed of our experience of life and our firmly implanted beliefs. As an example, we can consider the problem of Galileo who for years expounded the theory that the earth rotated around the sun. He was jeered at by his fellow men of science and finally forced to recant by his church — just because his theories were contrary to their firm belief that the earth was the centre of the universe. Their filter could not allow Galileo's theory to be true; they could not accept his message because their filter did not allow them to understand it.

"This is a strong example, but nevertheless, one that clearly illustrates the filter idea and enables us to recognize it. It also helps us to recognize the solution to the filter problem: do not attempt to evaluate the speaker's message until we are sure that we understand it. As well as keeping the mouth shut and the ears open, it is also necessary to keep the mind open (but not blank). We must, in the words of Professor Brookbank of Dal-

housie University, a communication specialist, 'practise non-evaluative listening'."

### **THREE CASE HISTORIES OF LMC COMMITTEES**

#### **What is a Labour-Management Committee?**

"Once you get past the immediate results, LMC is a pretty hard thing to pin down. Your committee membership changes, policies change, everything changes. I guess the best way you can define LMC is by saying that it's an attitude, an intangible that pays off in the long run."

The quote is from *Teamwork in Industry*, a monthly newspaper, produced by the LMC Branch, which carries information about committees across Canada. The speaker is a union representative on a committee that has been in operation for 21 years.

You can't argue with success!

#### **Joint Consultation Aids Negotiations**

The members of a newly formed committee devoted most of their first meeting to an easily identified common problem — their golf scores. After establishing meaningful dialogue on that subject, they turned to other matters. Here's how they scored:

Every other year the companies and union of the Vancouver glass industry met to discuss the terms of the new contract. And every other year, the results were the same — conciliation. Then, in 1968, for the first time in recent history, the pattern changed. The contract was settled and signed before expiry. A new approach had been tried — prior joint consultation.





Although every joint consultation committee has the same basic structure, every one is different in its approach.

This joint consultation committee was different right from the start: the major part of the first meeting was given over to members' discussion of their problems on the golf course. There was a serious purpose behind this, though.

"We wanted to get to know one another," explained the management spokesman. "By the second meeting we had the old contract on the table. We started going through it sentence by sentence. At this early stage we still kept away from the gut issues, as I recall."

The committee, which met for seven months prior to opening negotiations on the new contract, represented 23 companies and 225 unionists in British Columbia.

Both sides were determined to smooth out any problems that would hold up bargaining. The consultations, which opened with the June 1967 meeting, became more and more effective and three final, highly productive, meetings held in March cleared away a lot of problems.

The council forestalled problems that might have been expected to arise with the new contract by an unusual approach — examining the old contract. They went over it, detail by detail, each getting a clear idea of what they had and what they wanted. Members had these comments:

"By clarifying the old contract we got a firm idea of our expectations for the next one.

"We were able to discuss controversial

items though we stayed clear of cost items".

But the joint consultation approach does not necessarily lead to a consensus. As one council member explained "If you want to be specific about it, you could say that in seven months of meetings we didn't agree on anything." And that was fine, for, he continued, "this wasn't our purpose... Normally we would have started bargaining cold. We would have wasted the first couple of months haggling over minor items.

"As mutual confidence improved the council's determination to make joint consultation succeed began to pay off" he explained. "We were able to move into the controversial items... By the time we reached the last meeting just prior to bargaining we knew the union's honest position." Needless to say, the union knew management's position and the contract was signed before expiry.

A union representative reported that the membership is in favour of the council and its continuing role in smoothing the way for negotiations. Problems are settled at the monthly meetings before they have time to grow into major issues. A lot of unnecessary heat is off the bargaining table, now.

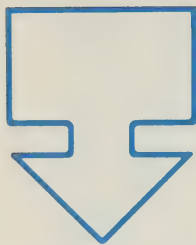
Some of the council's discussion points were:

- qualifications for journeymen
- scope of work
- statutory holidays
- deductions for employee welfare plan

#### **Joint Consultation on an Industry-Wide Scale**

Is it redundant to establish a joint con-





sultation committee when relations are already good? It is not, no more than buying insurance when one is young and in good health is redundant.

In Edmonton, a unique form of joint consultation has spelled progress and unity for the local sheet metal working industry. In fact, the joint consultation committee has been credited with strengthening the ties between the disparate elements of the industry, and aiding its survival.

The committee, which is known as a Joint Adjustment Board, speaks for 40 contracting firms and more than 450 workers.

"Our industry contains so many jobs in so many areas that if we did not have the guidelines agreed upon by the board there would be chaos. The whole industry here could well have been taken over by another group," said a member of the board.

As an example of the diversity of the industry, consider one company which manufactures formed metal products — everything from heating ductwork to steel prefabricated tank trucks.

Even though the various elements of the industry were in the habit of consulting with each other, the idea of the board was first received with scepticism. It is now ten years old and still going strong.

What are the ingredients of its success?

To begin with, the board, right from its founding, was determined to succeed. Both management and labour were totally committed to working together to maintain an extraordinary record — 63 years without a strike!

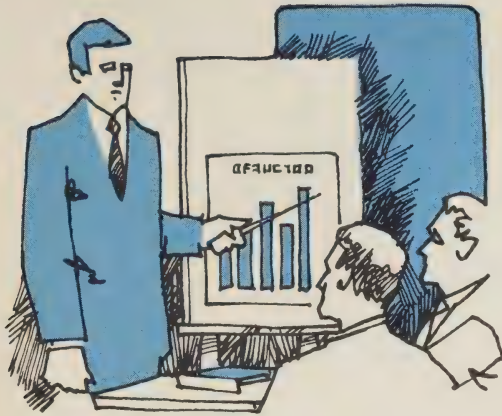
A management representative put it this way, "... those people who say that labour and management can never get together, because they're at opposing ends, are forgetting a basic factor: that whoever you are, you both derive a livelihood from your industry or business. If it is healthy and well-adjusted both will get a good living. But if you are at loggerheads — well, a divided house doesn't stand for very long.

"The board is a two-way street for open discussion on all problems", he continued. "Our main concern is that we don't let minor differences develop into major points of contention. As soon as a potential problem arises we discuss it so that it doesn't grow into a big grievance. Good communications are a great benefit."

This co-operative attitude is habit-forming — it colours members' approaches to problems. The members act on the belief that all matters of joint concern are subjects for joint discussion.

A typical board meeting can cover every subject except wages and hours of work. Should any issue be unresolved and there is a tie vote, another person, acceptable to both management and union, is called in to act as chairman. When no agreement can be reached on the chairman to be appointed, then the provincial minister of labour is asked to appoint one.

Three members each represent the interests of labour and of management. Meetings are held once a month; more often if required. This takes the heat off contract negotiations, and when it comes



time to sit down at the bargaining table, issues that might have become hot points have already been dealt with by the board.

Although respect and understanding are vital ingredients in the smooth working of the board, this does not mean that all dealings are "sweetness and light".

"Respect doesn't, of course, mean that we have to agree. We have our fights but generally we resolve them. Or sometimes we agree to disagree," said the business manager of the union local, "The joint management board is good for management, good for the industry, and it's good for labour too".

Among the accomplishments of the board are:

- preparation of a heating and ventilating code, developed in conjunction with other trade and supply groups,
- the supplying of examiners for the apprenticeship program,
- the establishment of the board's own health and welfare plan.

#### **Joint Consultation in a Small Plant**

What about labour-management consultation in a small plant where practically everyone knows everyone else? According to the manager of one such plant, labour-management consultation has made the plant easier to run.

One plant in Medicine Hat, Alberta, with 170 employees, found a place for a labour-management consultation committee and after a slow start the committee has been going well ever since.

The committee had been in full operation for about a year before the 1969 negotiations and these negotiations were,

according to the union president, the first in his experience in which "everything was on the table."

Toward the end of 1969, only one grievance had been filed. In the previous year, in the early days of the labour-management committee (it started meeting irregularly in 1968), there had been seven grievances and in 1967, the year before the committee was formed, there had been 20 grievances with six of these going to arbitration. As the committee grew in strength, the number of grievances decreased and even this single one was the outcome of an agreement — an agreement to disagree.

The grievance was a matter of interpretation. It had been discussed at great length and as the plant manager explained, "We had brought it down to bare essentials and each held the attitude 'You may be right, but I don't think you are' so all we could do was go to a third party."

The plant has 170 employees, of whom 145 are hourly rated employees.

The committee consists of six members, three representing the union and three management, and all filling a "dual capacity" role — that is, committee members are the same people who negotiate the contract.

The committee boasts that it never has to discuss the same subject twice and there are no limits to discussion except that departmental problems *must* be discussed first with the foreman involved.

Union-originated topics deal usually with subjects where no policy has been



established. The plant manager explained that whenever a subject is raised that has never been discussed before "we react by setting a working policy".

In its turn, the company uses the committee to pass on information on policy development or changes that would affect or interest the employees, for, as a management spokesman pointed out, "It's a lot easier to run a plant when the employees are kept informed." Consultation has done more than minimize disputes; it has helped the men negotiate the contract in good faith.

This good faith has also resulted in these accomplishments:

- establishing working policies;
- keeping employees informed, e.g., as when new machinery was to be installed;
- boosting plant morale — as shown by the decline in grievances.

#### **PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS**

- A Slow Burn
- The Forgotten Few
- Three "Shorts"

The following problems and solutions were drawn from the files of the LMC Branch. Some were printed in *Teamwork in Industry*, the branch's monthly newspaper; some appear here for the first time; all are based on actual situations that committees have had to face.

We hope they will provide some guidelines...

#### **A Slow Burn Generates a Lot of Heat**

It's the end of the first labour-management committee meeting, and frankly there isn't a happy face coming out of the committee room.

The management are shocked and angry. After ten years of confrontation with the union they had proposed the committee, set up the meeting time, and even put together a give-and-take agenda to help the committee through its first attempt at joint consultation.

Now, the management — their ears still ringing with the complaints of the local union officers — have had enough to last a lifetime.

What happened, of course, was that the union people unfamiliar with the purpose, heaved out the agenda and used the meeting to let fly a 10-year accumulation of "beefs".

Management could only shake their heads in disgust — "How," they asked themselves, "could we have been talked into scheduling a griping session?" And if management's thinking had stopped there, the committee would have been dead.

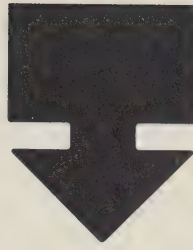
But management persisted, and although the same thing happened on the second and third meetings, the fourth was different.

How did management cope?

Management concluded they were in part responsible for the performance of their union counterparts on the committee.

They looked back over the last 10 years, saw that communication with the employees had been restricted to the electric atmosphere of collective bargaining, and understood the union representatives' eagerness to vent frustration at the consultation table. A slow burn can get awfully hot over a decade.





Management's next move was to sift through the debris of "the griping session", pull out some commonsense employee opinions and act on them.

It was clear to management that this "beefing" atmosphere was necessary, if both sides were to pull together to make future meetings more productive.

Management ploughed ahead, testing and answering employee complaints and requests. Each succeeding meeting gained in productivity. Unionists concluded that management was sincere, and responded in like manner. They responded by listening to what management had to say. Meetings took on a give-and-take atmosphere.

Joint consultation took hold — with perseverance and experience.

### **The Forgotten Few**

Plant X has always enjoyed reasonable industrial relations. The idea of establishing a labour-management joint consultation committee seemed to both management and the union as an excellent method of improving these relations even further. Both visualized their joint committee as a good meeting ground to exchange ideas, to discuss employee suggestions, to iron out problems.

But the committee never got off the ground. It seemed to create more problems than it solved; there were no employee ideas. Instead of establishing mutual trust, the committee seemed to be caught in a mid-structure resentment which infected both management and the employees.

What went wrong — and where?

Both management and the union had agreed in advance that a labour-management joint consultation committee would be good for their plant. Their representatives started joint consultation discussions. But — management had forgotten one vital factor. In order to ensure success all plant supervisors and foremen must be brought into the complete picture. They must be shown how joint consultation can help them in their work. In Plant X this was not done. The foremen and supervisors began to think that the committee was usurping their authority by encouraging the employees to bypass them.

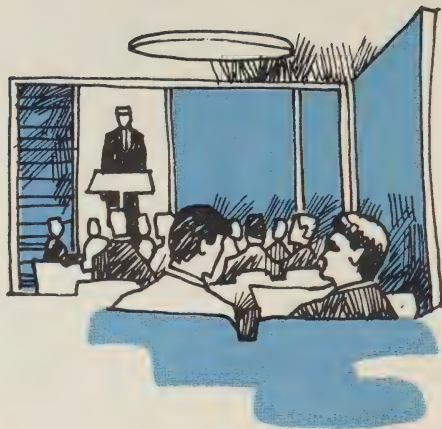
Supervisors and foremen are most important people in the company structure. No committee can work well without their support. Always remember to bring them into the picture at the very beginning; then they will work well with the committee and the employees. Supervisors and foremen are also integral members of the team. Don't forget them.

### **Three "Shorts"**

The committee had just been formed. It had held its first meeting and things seemed to be going well. Then, just before the second meeting, the employees heard rumours about the sale of their firm — a ripe situation for morale-breaking rumours to grow and spread.

The sale was discussed at the meeting and within 24 hours the plant was virtually blanketed with minutes of that meeting. The secretary reported "There wasn't a shred of trouble."

That's good communication.



The employers criticized the union for not understanding the problems facing a particular employer—or even those facing the whole industry. True—the union replied. They pointed out that the employers must shoulder some of the blame, for they made no effort to discuss these problems except at the bargaining table.

Joint consultation groups were set up to fill the communication gap. To meet the challenge of technological change, committees have set up training centres financed by the employers who were sold, at the consultation table, on the need to retrain craftsmen to handle the new machines.

An early retirement program was established after long joint consultation.

\* \* \*

"The work force is in a better frame of mind when it knows it's being listened to by management," the union representative said. "The employees are more careful in their work when they feel they belong".

This committee was formed to try to cope with the heavy expenses of settling customers' claims against the freight-handling company, but soon they began to discuss other things. They didn't plan it that way; it just happened. And then suggestions began to come to the committee. One suggestion virtually eliminated claims for water-damaged goods. During wet weather, rain cascaded off the roof over the truck-loading zone. The employees suggested eavestroughing. Sounds obvious, perhaps? And yet, no one had thought of it before. It took

the men who worked *there*, at that loading zone, to zero in on the simple solution.

### CONSULTATION ON A GRAND SCALE

"There is a very cynical definition of democracy, you know, as being a state of affairs where there are a few people who make things happen and there are many people who watch things happen and there is the vast majority who have no idea of what's happening.

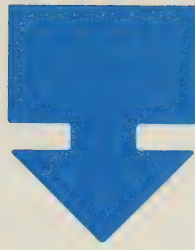
Too often, unfortunately, that definition of democracy applies.

When a crisis hits there should be communication channels and people should have the kind of relationships that can allow them to struggle with one another without causing tremendous hostility. If you have those things, then you can control a crisis. If you don't have those things, you get suspicion, hostility, apathy and you look on somebody from the outside to save you, which may sometimes be the last resort."

- Professor C. Roy Brookbank, speaking at a conference at Corner Brook, Newfoundland.

The role of the Canada Department of Labour in promoting consultation is not that of an outsider, but a catalyst. Its knowledge and skilled personnel are made available to plants and businesses to promote better communication in the immediate work environment through the committee.

Aimed at developing better consultation channels in the larger industrial relations community. Through industry-wide or area-wide conferences, the principle of



joint consultation is put into practice on a scale that involves federal, municipal, and provincial governments and leaders of the community itself.

Let's take the Corner Brook conference as an example. Although it was the 14th area conference in which the Department of Labour had been involved, it was the first to be held in Newfoundland. Of the 153 delegates, approximately 40 per cent represented management and 36 per cent union; 24 per cent were academics, civic and church leaders and delegates from provincial and federal governments. Co-sponsors were the Newfoundland Federation of Labour, Corner Brook and District Labour Council, Canadian Labour Congress, Corner Brook Chamber of Commerce, City of Corner Brook, Inter-Faith Social Action Committee of Corner Brook and the Newfoundland and federal labour departments.

The theme of the conference was "How Communications Can Make for Better Labour-Management Relations." According to the delegates, that first conference was a success they would like to see repeated. At the close of the conference, of 80 delegates who were asked to respond to the query, "Would you like to have similar conferences in the future?", 79 answered "yes".

To date, there have been 20 area conferences. The majority are built around the theme of improvement of co-operation and consultation through improving communication in a particular geographical area.

In 1968, a new approach was introduced: a conference held at Saskatoon

promoted union-management co-operation in one specific industry — printing. The theme was "Automation in the Printing Industry". Of the 262 delegates attending, 48 per cent represented employees, 42 per cent employers, and 10 per cent universities and civic, provincial and federal governments.

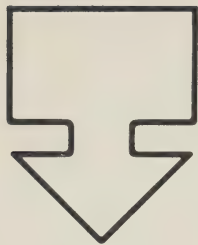
One of the main criticisms of the conference was that it was too short!

At the Saskatoon conference, Professor H. W. Roberts, Department of Extension, University of Alberta, said there are two approaches to the problems created by automation — playing it as a private enterprise game, or involving government and the whole society. "In the light of the awful areas of poverty and human despair in such an affluent economy in the U.S.A. and in the light of the way in which I see automation pervading the whole industrial structure in the future, I find myself forced toward the latter," he said.

"Whatever the assumption is — either that the responsibility and benefits are exclusively to be bargained out between management and employee, or that it's a matter in which the government and society have to share — it seems to me that employers and employees, industrialists and unions, ought to be talking to the government about this whole question of responsibility. This, I suppose is why we are here."

To reduce conflict in industrial relations by keeping communication channels open and functioning, and by developing joint consultation on local scene or on a community-wide basis — that is





why the Labour-Management Consultation Branch is here.

Call us, tell us your needs, and we can help you tailor a committee to fit those needs.

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